NUMB. LXX.

The SPECTATOR.

Interdum vulgus rectum videt. Hor.

Monday, May 21. 1711.

WHEN I travelled, I took a particular Delight in hearing the Songs and Fables that are come from Father to Son, and are most in vogue among the common People of the Countries through which I passed; for it is impossible that any thing should be universally tasted and approved by a Multitude, tho' they are only the Rabble of a Nation, which hath not in it some peculiar Aptness to please and gratify the Mind of Man. Human Nature is the same in all reasonable Creatures; and whatever falls in with it, will meet with Admirers amongst Readers of all Qualities and Conditions. *Moliere*, as we are told by Monsieur *Boileau*, used to read all his Comedies to a little old Woman that was his House-keeper, as she sat with him at her Work by the Chimney-Corner; and could foretell the Success of his Play in the Theatre, from the Reception it met at his Fire-Side: For he tells us the Audience always followed the old Woman, and never failed to laugh in the same Place.

I know nothing that more shews the essential and inherent Perfection of Simplicity of Thought, above that which I call the Gothick Manner in Writing, than this, that the first pleases all Kinds of Palates, and the latter only such as have formed to themselves a wrong artificial Taste upon little fanciful Authors and Writers of Epigram. *Homer*, *Virgil*, or *Milton*, so far as the Language of their Poems is understood, will please a Reader of plain common Sense, that would neither relish nor comprehend an Epigram of *Martial* or a Poem of *Cowley*: So, on the contrary, an ordinary Song or Ballad that is the Delight of the common People, cannot fail to please all such Readers as are not unqualified for the Entertainment by their Affectation or Ignorance; and the Reason is plain, because the same Paintings of Nature which recommend it to the most ordinary Reader, will appear beautiful to the most refined.

The old Song of *Chevy Chase* is the favourite Ballad of the common People of *England*; and *Ben. Johnson* used to say he had rather have been the Author of it than of all his Works. Sir *Philip Sidney* in his Discourse of Poetry speaks of it in the following Words; *I never heard the old Song of* Piercy *and* Douglas, *that I found not my Heart more moved than with a Trumpet; and yet is sung by some blind Crowder with no rougher Voice than rude Stile; which being so evil apparelled in the Dust and Cobweb of that uncivil Age, what would it work trimmed in the gorgeous Eloquence of* Pindar? For my own Part, I am so professed an Admirer of that antiquated Song, that I shall give my Reader a Critick upon it, without any further Apology for so doing.

The greatest modern Criticks have laid it down as a Rule, That an heroick Poem should be founded upon some important Precept of Morality, adapted to the Constitution of the Country in which the Poet writes. *Homer* and *Virgil* have formed their Plans in this View. As *Greece* was a Collection of many Governments, who suffered very much among themselves, and gave the *Persian* Emperour, who was their common Enemy, many Advantage over them by their mutual Jealousies and Animosities, *Homer*, in order to establish among them an Union, which was so necessary for their Safety, grounds his Poem upon the Discords of the several *Grecian* Princes who were engaged in a Confederacy against an *Asiatick* Prince, and the several Advantages which the Enemy gained by such their Discords. At the Time the Poem we are now treating of was written, the Dissentions of the Barons, who were then so many petty Princes, ran very high, whether they quarrell'd among themselves or with their Neighbours, and produced unspeakable Calamities to the Country: The Poet, to deter Men from such unnatural Contentions, describes a bloody Battle and dreadful Scene of Death, occasioned by the mutual Feuds that reigned in the Families of an *English* and *Scotch* Nobleman. That he design'd this for the Instruction of his Poem, we may learn from his four last Lines, in which, after the Example of the modern Tragedians, he draws from it a Precept for the Benefit of his Readers.

God save the King and bless the Land
In Plenty, Joy, and Peace;
And grant henceforth that foul Debate
'Twixt Noblemen may cease.

The next Point observed by the greatest Heroic Poets, hath been to celebrate Persons and Actions which do Honour to their Country: Thus *Virgil*'s Hero was the Founder of *Rome*, *Homer*'s a Prince of *Greece*; and for this Reason *Valerius Flaccus* and *Statius*, who were both *Romans*, might be justly derided for having chosen the Expedition of the *Golden Fleece* and *the Wars of Thebes*, for the Subject of their Epic Writings.

The Poet before us, has not only found out an Hero in his own Country, but raises the Reputation of it by several beautiful Incidents. The *English* are the first that take the Field, and the last that quit it. The *English* bring only Fifteen hundreed to the Battle, the *Scotch* Two thousand. The *English* keep the Field with Fifty three: The *Scotch* retire with Fifty five: All the rest on each Side being slain in Battle. But the most remarkable Circumstance of this Kind, is the different Manner in which the *Scotch* and *English* Kings received the News of this Fight, and of the great Mens Deaths who commanded in it.

This News was brought to Edinburgh,
Where Scotland's *King did reign,*
That brave Earl Douglas *suddenly*
Was with an Arrow slain.

O heavy

O *heavy News, King* James *did say,*
Scotland *can Witneſs be,*
I have not any Captain more
Of ſuch Account as he.

Like Tydings to King Henry *came*
Within as ſhort a Space,
That Piercy *of* Northumberland
Was ſlain in Chevy-Chace.

Now God be with him, ſaid our King,
Sith 'twill no better be,
I truſt I have within my Realm
Five hundred as good as he.

Yet ſhall not Scot *nor* Scotland *ſay*
But I will Vengeance take,
And be revenged on them all
For brave Lord Piercy*'s Sake.*

This Vow full well the King perform'd
After on Humble-down,
In one Day Fifty Knights were ſlain
With Lords of great Renown.

And of the reſt of ſmall Account
Did many Thouſands dye, &c.

At the ſame Time that our Poet ſhews a laudable Partiality to his Country-men, he repreſents the *Scots* after a Manner not unbecoming ſo bold and brave a People.

Earl Douglas *on a milk-white Steed,*
Moſt like a Baron bold,
Rode foremoſt of the Company
Whoſe Armour ſhone like Gold.

His Sentiments and Actions are every Way ſuitable to an Hero. One of us two, ſays he, muſt dye: I am an Earl as well as your ſelf, ſo that you can have no Pretence for refuſing the Combat: However, ſays he, 'tis Pity, and indeed would be a Sin, that ſo many innocent Men ſhould periſh for our Sakes; rather let you and I end our Quarrel by a ſingle Combat.

E'er thus I will out-braved be,
One of us two ſhall dye;
I know thee well, an Earl thou art,
Lord Piercy, *ſo am I.*

But truſt me, Piercy, *Pity it were,*
And great Offence, to kill
Any of theſe our harmleſs Men,
For they have done no Ill.

Let thou and I the Battle try,
And ſet our Men aſide;
Accurſt be he, Lord Piercy *ſaid,*
By whom this is deny'd.

When theſe brave Men had diſtinguiſhed themſelves in the Battle and in ſingle Combat with each other, in the Midſt of a generous Parly, full of heroic Sentiments, the *Scotch* Earl falls; and with his dying Words encourages his Men to revenge his Death, repreſenting to them, as the moſt bitter Circumſtance of it, that his Rival ſaw him fall.

With that there came an Arrow keen
Out of an Engliſh *bow,*
Which ſtruck Earl Douglas *to the Heart*
A deep and deadly Blow.

Who never ſpoke more Words than theſe,
Fight on my merry Men all;
For why, my Life is at an End,
Lord Piercy *ſees my Fall.*

Merry Men, in the Language of thoſe Times, is no more than a chearful Word for Companions and Fellow-Soldiers. A Paſſage in the Eleventh Book of *Virgil*'s *Æneids* is very much to be admired, where *Camilla* in her laſt Agonies, inſtead of weeping over the Wound ſhe had received, as one might have expected from a Warriour of her Sex, conſiders only (like the Hero of whom we are now ſpeaking) how the Battle ſhould be continued after her Death.

Tum ſic exſpirans, &c.

A gathering Miſt o'erclouds her chearful Eyes;
And from her Cheeks the roſie Colour flies.
Then, turns to her, whom, of her Female Train,
She truſted moſt, and thus ſhe ſpeaks with Pain.
Acca, *'tis paſt! He ſwims before my Sight,*
Inexorable Death; and claims his Right.
Bear my laſt Words to Turnus, *fly with Speed,*
And bid him timely to my Charge ſucceed:
Repel the Trojans, *and the Town relieve:*
Farewel.———

Turnus did not die in ſo heroic a Manner; tho' our Poet ſeems to have had his Eye upon *Turnus*'s Speech in the laſt Verſe

Lord Piercy *ſees my Fall.*

——Victi, & victum tendere palmas
Auſonii videre———.

Earl *Piercy*'s Lamentation over his Enemy is generous, beautiful, and paſſionate; I muſt only caution the Reader not to let the Simplicity of the Stile, which one may well pardon in ſo old a Poet, prejudice him againſt the Greatneſs of the Thought.

Then leaving Life Earl Piercy *took*
The dead Man by the Hand,
And ſaid Earl Douglas *for thy Life*
Would I had loſt my Land.

O Chriſt! my very Heart doth bleed
With Sorrow for thy Sake;
For ſure a more renowned Knight
Miſchance did never take.

That beautiful Line *Taking the dead Man by the Hand*, will put the Reader in Mind of *Æneas*'s Behaviour towards *Lauſus*, whom he himſelf had ſlain as he came to the Reſcue of his aged Father.

At vero ut vultum vidit morientis, & ora,
Ora modis Anchiſiades, pallentia miris:
Ingemuit, miſerans graviter, dextramque tetendit, &c.

The pious Prince beheld young Lauſus *dead;*
He griev'd, he wept; then graſp'd his Hand, and ſaid,
Poor hapleſs Youth! What Praiſes can be paid
To Worth ſo great———!

I ſhall take another Opportunity to conſider the other Parts of this old Song.

At the Deſire of ſeveral Ladies of Quality.
For the Benefit of Mr. Thurmond.
By Her Majeſty's Company of Comedians.

AT the Theatre Royal in Drury-Lane, this preſent Monday, being the 21ſt of May, will be preſented a Play call'd, The Libertine deſtroy'd. The Part of Don John by Mr. Mills, Jacomo Mr. Johnſon, Antonio Mr. Thurmood, Lopez Mr. Bickerſtaff, Franciſco Mr. Keene, Leonora Mrs. Knight, Maria Mrs. Porter, Octavia Miſs Sherburn, Flavia Miſs Willis, the Shepherds Mr. Norris, Mr. Leigh, Mr. Pack, and Mr. Burkhead. With all the Original Decorations proper to the Play. And a Dance by a Dutch Skipper and his Wife. And to Morrow will be reviv'd a Comedy (not acted theſe 3 Years) call'd, The Squire of Alſatia. For the Benefit of Mrs. Powell and Mr. Croſs.

This Play is ſold by Jacob Tonſon, at Shakeſpear's Head over-againſt Catharine-ſtreet in the Strand.

An Entertainment of Muſick, conſiſting of a Poem, called, the Paſſion of Sapho: Written by Mr. Hatton. And the Feaſt of Alexander: Written by Mr. Dryden; as they are ſet to Muſick by Mr. Thomas Clayton (Author of Arſinoe) will be performed at his Houſe in York Buildings, on Thurſday the 24th Inſtant: Beginning at 8 in the Evening. Tickets, at 5 s. each may be had at Mr. Charles Lillies, the Corner of Beauford-Buildings, and at Mr. Elliot's at St. James's Coffee-houſe.

This Poem is ſold by Jacob Tonſon, at Shakeſpear's Head over-againſt Catherine-ſtreet in the Strand.

The famous Water-Theatre of the late ingenious Mr. Winſtanly is open'd, and will continue to be ſhewn for ſome time this Summer: There is the greateſt Curioſities in Water-works, the like was never perform'd before by any. It is ſhewn for the Benefit of his Widow every Evening between 5 and 6 o'Clock. With ſeveral new Additions, as three new Stages, Sea Gods and Goddeſſes, Nymphs, Mermaids and Sayturns, all of them playing of Water as ſuitable, and ſome with Fire mingling with Water. It is at the lower End of Pickadilly, and is known by the Wind-mill on the Top of it.

For the Benefit of Mr. Rhodes.

At Stationer's Hall, this preſent Monday being the 21ſt Inſtant, will be perform'd a Conſort of Muſick by the beſt Maſters, to begin at 7 a Clock. Tickets to be had at Cooper's Coffee-houſe in Cornhill, St. Paul's Coffee-houſe, Rainbow Coffee-houſe Fleetbridge, and Potter's Coffee-houſe St. James's.

LONDON: Printed for *Sam. Buckley*, at the *Dolphin* in *Little-Britain*; and Sold by *A. Baldwin* in *Warwick-Lane*; where Advertiſements are taken in; as alſo by *Charles Lillie*, Perfumer, at the Corner of *Beauford-Buildings* in the *Strand*.